DDI-315-74

1 February 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Systems Analysis Staff, CRS

SUBJECT   : Preliminary Interviews with Selected
                    SAFE Users

1. On 30 January 1974, I conducted preliminary, structured interviews with four users of SAFE within three of the pilot branches. The objective was to gain initial impressions of user reaction and to get a better idea of how we should conduct a more complete evaluation later in the year. The four people interviewed were identified as being comparatively frequent users of SAFE. It can be assumed, therefore, that they are more enthusiastic about the system than the "average" analyst in the pilot branches. The observations summarized below should be viewed in this light.

Value of SAFE

2. There was general agreement that SAFE when fully implemented (i.e., with more files, larger files, and improved query language, greater availability and reliability) could be an extremely valuable tool for the production analyst although the degree of value will vary depending on the precise job that the individual analyst has assigned to him. One analyst feels that a SAFE-like system is "indispensible" while another said that the SAFE concept is one that the Agency should have moved with long ago. Even in its present state of development, the system is very useful.

3. There was general agreement that SAFE was just as important for providing access to non-branch files (e.g., AEGIS extracts) as for the application to branch files.

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Branch Files

4. At the present state of development, and for some simple searches, SAFE is more painful than the use of manual files. But the analysts interviewed all recognize that the system gives them capabilities far beyond those provided by manual files. Certain types of searches can be done much faster on-line and new types of searches are made possible for the first time by the SAFE system (i.e., there are searches that, while they might be theoretically possible to conduct manually, would not be carried out in practice because of the time and effort involved. Examples are searches involving combinations of codes (or keywords), date restrictions and security restrictions, or date, keyword and document source. The general feeling among those interviewed appears to be that SAFE gives them much better access to their files than they have ever had before. One analyst pointed out that the only alternative (and that an imperfect one) would be the construction of vast card indexes to the manual files and no one has had the time or motivation to do this in the past.

5. SAFE provides a level of access of much greater specificity then possible in manual files and its value will increase as the files grow in size.

AEGIS Extract Files

6. These are already of considerable value and their value will increase as analysts gain greater familiarity with their contents, how they have been indexed, and how to search them effectively. These files are likely to receive a large volume of use eventually within the pilot branches.

7. All four analysts agreed that they had been able to find valuable materials in these files that they were not aware of previously.

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8. For normal day-to-day use it is much more valuable to be able to access these files directly on-line than to request a search through CRS personnel. Physical accessibility is an important factor in the use of an information source. Analysts have conducted searches for themselves in cases where they would not be bothered visiting CRS to request that a search be conducted.

9. On-line access has the advantage of fast re-sponse as well as interactive, heuristic capabilities. On some occasions, however, especially in subject areas with which the analyst is not fully familiar, it may still be preferable to go to CRS and request help from a "professional."

Text Files

10. There was mixed reaction to the capability of searching full text files on-line. One of the four analysts feels that a full text search capability is of critical importance, the most valuable feature of the entire projected system. The other three analysts were more cautious. They are unsure of the value of this feature and would like to try it fully before they comment further.

Viewing Mail

11. The capability of viewing mail on-line is also viewed with somewhat mixed emotions. The feeling seems to be that, in general anything that will reduce un-necessary paper generation and movement is desirable. Nevertheless, on-line viewing of mail, if this is all the system can offer, may not be an improvement over viewing of paper copy. There is some feeling that it may be faster to scan a message, and determine its significance, from paper copy than from CRT display. This is especially true in the case of relatively long messages.

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12. If the one-line system gets mail to analysts faster, this is a definite advantage. Also, it may be possible to dispose of unwanted documents more easily in SAFE.

13. In short, the concept of a paperless communications process is accepted by these analysts, but with some reservations. The real payoff is likely to be the combination of on-line dissemination with on-line file building operations (see below).

On-Line Input

14. This concept is viewed favorably by all four analysts. While it will involve more work within a branch, it will be well worth it in terms of improved control and faster input. The need for rapid input of records was emphasized by all. It was pointed out that most documents have greatest value or interest in their early life (first few days) and that this value may decline rapidly. It is imperative that documents be accessible as soon as possible after receipt.

On-Line File Building

15. While attitude toward on-line viewing of mail is somewhat noncommittal at present, there seems to be considerable enthusiasm for the capability of combining this with an on-line file building facility. That is, the analysts interviewed like the idea of being able, once they have viewed a message on-line, of being able to select it for a particular file, index it, code it, and so on, as a single operation on the terminal.

Availability of System

16. Three of the four analysts are dissatisfied with the present reliability and level of availability of the system (one claims it is available less than

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fifty percent of the times he needs it). The fourth
analyst has not felt availability to be a problem.
Because he is not working under particularly tight
time constraints he is satisfied to try again if the
system is not available at his first attempt. Besides,
he now has his machine listing to fall back on!

Terminals

17. No problems encountered but some concern for
scheduling of terminal use as SAFE adds more capabili-
ties and more analysts want access.

Log-In

18. No real problems but those with experience
would like to avoid the SQUIRL interface. We need
experienced and inexperienced user search options,
with the more experienced searcher being given the
capability of moving directly to the file he needs to
consult.

Query Formulation

19. No real problems even with the AEGIS language.
It is fairly simple to learn and use and has proven
sufficiently flexible for present needs.

Learning Factor

20. There is general agreement that the system
becomes more valuable and easier to use with increased
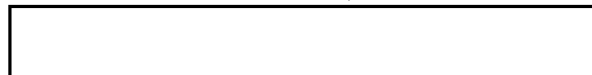experience.

General Suggestions

21. Three of the four analysts pointed out that
a critical need is an on-line file maintenance capa-
bility. It is not enough to be able to input records
on-line. Analysts must also be able to change records
in their own files in an on-line mode.

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    22.   The four analysts interviewed appear enthu-
siastic about SAFE and thoroughly endorse the SAFE
concept.

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